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THE CROSS-CULTURAL GENERALIZABILITY OF THE THEORY OF PLANNED BEHAVIOR
A Study on Job Seeking in the Netherlands

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This study examined the cross-cultural generalizability of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) as applied to job seeking, by comparing samples of native Dutch and Turkish individuals in The Netherlands. Results support the equivalence of the measures used. Moreover, the TPB relationships are found to be comparable across the two samples. Contrary to the predictions, intentions of Turkish individuals are not affected more by subjective norms and less by job search attitudes than those of native Dutch individuals.

Keywords: job search behavior; theory of planned behavior

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is a widely used theoretical framework that details the determinants of human behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Meta-analysis demonstrated its validity in the prediction of a large variety of social behaviors (Armitage & Conner, 2001). Also in the context of job seeking, research has confirmed the validity of the TPB (e.g., van Ryn & Vinokur, 1992). Studies on the TPB typically use Western samples, and job seeking has been studied almost exclusively from a Western point of view. Therefore the current study focused on the cross-cultural generalizability of the TPB in the context of job seeking.

Job seeking is an important aspect of people's work lives, as it determines the opportunity set of potential jobs from which job seekers may choose and influences employment outcomes such as job attainment and employment quality (Kanfer, Wanberg, & Kantrowitz, 2001). Although a considerable body of research has investigated the predictors of job seeking (see Kanfer et al., 2001), hardly any study investigated the generalizability of models explaining job search behavior to nontraditional applicant pools, such as ethnic minorities. The current study aims to fill this gap by examining the predictors of job seeking among Turkish immigrants in The Netherlands. These predictors were examined in the context of the TPB and were compared with the predictors of job seeking in a representative sample of the native-Dutch population.

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The Turkish migrant population was chosen because of its substantial size in The Netherlands, their relatively weak position in the labor market, and their cultural differences with the Dutch population. The first generation of Turkish immigrants came to The Netherlands in the late 1960s and early 1970s. As guest workers, they were mainly employed in lower skilled jobs, to resolve the shortages at the labor market for these jobs. Nowadays, they are the largest ethnic minority group, with 2.1% of the total population. However, their position at the labor market is relatively weak, as is indicated by high unemployment rates and overrepresentation in lower skilled jobs. Turkish culture differs from Dutch culture in the level of individualism versus collectivism (INDCOL). Whereas Dutch culture is a typical example of an individualistic culture, Turkish culture has been characterized as highly collectivistic (Hofstede, 1980; Javidan & House, 2001; Pasa, Kabasakal, & Bodur, 2001). The Turkish and Dutch cultures were selected because differences in INDCOL may affect the relationships as outlined by the TPB.

Applied to job seeking, the TPB states that the most proximal determinant of job-search behavior is the individual's intention to engage in job seeking. Job search intention comprises the motivation necessary to engage in job seeking. The more an individual intends to engage in job seeking, the more likely it is that actual job search activities are performed (cf. Ajzen, 1991). Job search intention is predicted by the extent to which a person evaluates job seeking positively or negatively (i.e., job search attitude), by the individual's perception of social pressure to look for a (new) job (i.e., subjective norm), and by people's confidence in their ability to perform various job search activities (i.e., perceived behavioral control; Ajzen, 1991). That is, people who regard job seeking as more beneficial and more sensible will be more likely to intend to search for a (new) job than people with less positive attitudes toward job seeking. Also, individuals will be more likely to form job search intentions as they perceive more social pressure from important others to do so. Last, people will be more likely to make job search intentions if they are more confident about their ability to perform job search activities. Based on the TPB, we expected the following:

Hypothesis 1*:* (a) Job search attitude, (b) subjective norm, and (c) perceived behavioral control positively predict job search intention.

The TPB was hypothesized to be a valid framework to predict job seeking for both native Dutch and Turkish Dutch individuals. However, based on differences in INDCOL, we expected differences in the relative weights of the predictors across the two cultural groups. In individualistic cultures, people tend to perceive themselves as autonomous individuals who are independent of the group ("independent self") and tend to prioritize personal goals above collective goals. Behavior in these cultures is guided more by personal attitudes than by social norms. Conversely, in collectivistic cultures, people tend to perceive themselves as interdependent with their group and tend to prioritize goals of the in-group above their personal goals. Behavior is guided more by anticipated expectations of others or social norms of the in-group than by internal dispositions such as personality traits and personal attitudes (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1998). Applied to the TPB, these theories about INDCOL and the self suggest that in collectivistic cultures, perceptions of social pressure (i.e., subjective norm) will predict behavior more strongly than in individualistic cultures. Internal dispositions such as personal attitudes are stronger predictors of behavior in individualistic cultures. Thus, we expect the following:

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Hypothesis 2: Job search intentions of Turkish immigrants are (a) more strongly predicted by subjective norm and (b) more weakly by job search attitude as compared to job search intentions of native Dutch individuals.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURES

Two separate samples were used: one sample of Turkish immigrants, and one sample reflecting a cross section of the native Dutch population.

Turkish sample. Respondents of Turkish descent who resided in The Netherlands were recruited using a networking approach. Fifteen Turkish individuals distributed 1,156 questionnaires among relatives, friends, and acquaintances from Turkish descent that belong to the (potential) labor force (i.e, aged 15 to 65). Individuals who were willing to participate were given a questionnaire in Dutch or in Turkish, depending on their preference. The questionnaires were collected by the distributor after completion. We used this approach because people are more likely to participate when someone they know personally asks them to. This way, we were able to create a broad sample of individuals of Turkish descent living in The Netherlands, with a wide variance on variables such as gender, age, and level of education.

A total of 268 respondents participated (response rate of 23.2%). The majority of the respondents (68.3%) completed the Turkish version of the questionnaire. Nearly two thirds of the respondents were male (n = 169), age ranged from 16 to 48 (M = 27.0, SD = 8.2), 18.8% held a college or university degree, and 70.1% of the respondents were employed. Nearly 40% (n =166) were not born in The Netherlands. The average length of stay in The Netherlands of these foreign-born participants was 15.76 years (SD = 7.76).

Native Dutch sample. A total of 1,854 members (aged 15 to 65) of the telepanel of a Dutch research center (CentERdata) completed a questionnaire as part of a larger study (van Hooft, Born, Taris, & van der Flier, 2005). This panel represents the Dutch population with regard to age, sex, religion, level of education, and geographical distribution. Participants with a nonnative Dutch background were excluded from the analyses (n = 44). About half of the respondents were male (52.3%), the average age was 40.2 (SD = 12.4), 35.4% held a college or university degree, and 75.8% of the respondents were employed.

MEASURES

Items were based on previous research (see van Hooft et al., 2005), translated into Turkish by two professional translators following a translation–back translation procedure and pilot tested among bilingual Turkish students.

Dependent variable. Job search intention was assessed by six items. Participants were asked to indicate how much time they intended to spend on job search activities (i.e., reading job ads, talking with friends and/or relatives about job leads, contacting employment agencies, looking for jobs on the Internet, making inquiries to employers, and sending out

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application letters) in the next 4 months. Response options ranged from 1 = *no time at all* to 5 = *very much time*.

Independent variables. To measure job search attitude, respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they regarded it sensible, wise, or useless (reverse scored) to seek a (new) job in the next 4 months. Subjective norm was measured with a two-item scale, asking the respondents to indicate the extent to which their significant other and most people who are important to them, respectively, think they should seek a (new) job in the next 4 months. Job search self-efficacy was used as a measure of perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991; van Ryn & Vinokur, 1992). Six items were selected, including "I have confidence in my abilities to complete a good job application" and "I am confident of my ability to make a good impression in job interviews." Response options for all these items ranged from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*.

Control variables. Because the samples differed significantly regarding sex, age, level of education, and employment position, multivariate $F(4, 2061) = 89.52$, $p < .001$, these variables were selected as control variables. Sex was coded 0 = male and 1 = female. Level of education was coded 1 = *low* (i.e., primary education or lower vocational training), 2 = *medium* (i.e., secondary school or intermediate vocational training), and 3 = *high* (i.e., college or university). Employment position was assessed with the following item: "Do you have a paid job at the moment?" (0 = no, 1 = yes).

ANALYSES AND RESULTS

Structural equation modeling using LISREL 8.30 was applied to examine the cross-cultural equivalence of our measures and to test the hypothesized structural model. Covariances between the items were analyzed (after listwise deletion), and maximum likelihood was used as the estimation method. Table 1 reports the goodness-of-fit statistics of the models tested, the resulting path coefficients, and the explained variance in intention.

First, the measurement model was tested in both samples separately using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Fit indices were satisfactory in both samples (e.g., *RMSEA* < .06, *SRMR* < .08, *CFI* and *NNFI* close to .95; cf. Hu & Bentler, 1999), all factor loadings (λ_x and λ_y) were high and significant, and modification indices were small. Because these analyses demonstrated that the observed variables were good indicators of the latent factors they were supposed to represent, we proceeded to test the structural equation model in each sample separately. The structural model with job search attitude, subjective norm, and self-efficacy predicting job search intention demonstrated satisfactory fit in both samples. However, only attitude significantly contributed to the prediction of intention in each sample, with path coefficients of .70 in the native Dutch sample and .44 in the Turkish sample. Path coefficients of self-efficacy were comparable in magnitude across the samples, but because of differences in sample size they were significant in the native Dutch sample only. The effect of subjective norm was not significant in any of the two samples. Controlling for sex, age, level of education, and employment position hardly changed the results. Age had a small negative effect on intention in both samples. The effects of level of education and employment position were small and positive in both samples but significant in the native Dutch sample only.

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TABLE 1

Goodness-of-Fit Statistics, Path Coefficients, and Squared Multiple Correlations for the Confirmatory Factor Analyses (CFA) and Structural Equation Models (SEM) in the Native Dutch and Turkish Samples

Model	χ^2	df	*RMSEA*	*SRMR*	*GFI*	*NNFI*	*CFI*	Δdf	$\Delta\chi^2$	$\gamma_{attitude}$	$\gamma_{subj.norm}$	$\gamma_{self\text{-}efficacy}$	γ_{sex}	γ_{age}	$\gamma_{education}$	$\gamma_{empl.pos.}$	R^2
Single-group analyses																	
Native Dutch sample																	
CFA	730.49*	113	.055	.029	.95	.95	.96										
SEM	730.49*	113	.055	.029	.95	.95	.96			.70*	.01	.11*					.49
SEM with control variables	1056.49*	165	.055	.036	.95	.93	.94			.68*	.02	.09*	.00	−.05*	.04*	.04*	.50
Turkish sample																	
CFA	194.54*	113	.056	.070	.91	.93	.94										
SEM	194.54*	113	.056	.070	.91	.93	.94			.44*	.05	.10					.24
SEM with control variables	293.86*	165	.058	.057	.89	.89	.91			.43*	.08	.07	.04	−.14*	.03	.05	.25
Multigroup analyses																	
CFA																	
Baseline	929.42*	229	.055	.068	.91	.95	.96										
λs invariant	984.01*	242	.055	.085	.89	.95	.95	13	54.59*								
λs and ξs invariant	1000.37*	245	.055	.093	.88	.95	.95	3	16.36*								
λs, ξs, and φs invariant	1080.99*	249	.057	.120	.86	.94	.95	4	80.62*								
SEM[a]																	
Baseline	925.03*	226	.055	.055	.91	.95	.96			.71*	.01	.11*					.49
										.40*	.05	.10					.23
λs invariant	985.58*	239	.055	.085	.89	.95	.95	13	60.55*	.69*	.01	.10*					.49
										.50*	.04	.13					.24
λs and γs invariant	987.40*	242	.055	.087	.89	.95	.95	3	1.82	.66*	.02	.10*					.48
										.66*	.02	.10*					.33
λs, γs, ξs and ζs invariant	1080.99*	249	.057	.120	.86	.94	.95	7	93.59*	.67*	.02	.11*					.46
										.67*	.02	.11*					.46

(Continued)

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TABLE 1
(Continued)

Model	χ^2	df	*RMSEA*	*SRMR*	*GFI*	*NNFI*	*CFI*	Δdf	$\Delta\chi^2$	$\gamma_{attitude}$	$\gamma_{subj.norm}$	$\gamma_{self\text{-}efficacy}$	γ_{sex}	γ_{age}	$\gamma_{education}$	$\gamma_{empl.pos.}$	R^2
SEM with control variables[a]																	
Baseline	1472.66*	352	.056	.091	.86	.92	.93			.69*	.02	.09*	.00	−.05*	.04	.05*	.50
										.38*	.07	.06	.04	−.19*	.03	.03	.29
λs invariant	1534.84*	365	.056	.100	.84	.92	.93	13	62.18*	.67*	.02	.09*	.00	−.05*	.04	.04*	.50
										.48*	.06	.09	.05	−.23*	.05	.03	.29
λs and γs invariant	1539.93*	372	.056	.100	.84	.92	.93	7	5.09	.65*	.02	.09*	.00	−.05*	.04*	.04*	.49
										.65*	.02	.09*	.00	−.05*	.04*	.04*	.33
λs, γs, ξs and	1638.12*	379	.057	.120	.82	.92	.93	7	98.19*	.65*	.03	.09*	.00	−.06*	.04*	.04*	.47
ζs invariant										.65*	.03	.09*	.00	−.06*	.04*	.04*	.47

NOTE: N = 1,806 in the native Dutch sample, and 233 in the Turkish sample. χ^2 = goodness-of-fit chi-square statistic. *df* = degrees of freedom for chi-square statistic. *RMSEA* = root mean square error of approximation. *SRMR* = standardized root mean square of residuals. *GFI* = goodness-of-fit index. *NNFI* = nonnormed fit index. *CFI* = comparative fit index. Δ*df* and $\Delta\chi^2$ = change in degrees of freedom and chi-square relative to previous model. $\gamma_{attitude}$ = (common metric) standardized path coefficient between job search attitude and job search intention. R^2 = squared multiple correlation of job search intention. λ = factor loadings in measurement model. ξ = factor variances of independent variables. φ = factor covariances between independent variables. γ = path coefficients in structural model. ζ = factor variance of dependent variable.

a. For each model, the path coefficients ($\gamma_{attitude}$ etc.) and R^2s are presented for the native Dutch sample on the first row, and for the Turkish sample, they are presented on the second row.

* $p < .05$.

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Second, the generalizability of the measurement model and the invariance of the structural parameters across the samples were tested using multigroup analyses. A two-group CFA baseline model was estimated, in which all parameters were set free across the two groups. Next, a series of equality constraints were imposed, testing the degree of measurement equivalence. The baseline model showed adequate fit, supporting the generalizability of the factor pattern. Subsequent models in which the factor loadings, the factor variances, and the factor covariances were set invariant demonstrated only small decreases in model fit. As CFI and NNFI values decreased by .01 or less, the CFA model was concluded to be equivalent across the two samples (cf. Cheung & Rensvold, 2002). Proceeding with the structural equation model analyses, again a baseline model was estimated, in which all parameters were allowed to vary freely across the two groups. The baseline model fit the data well. Subsequent models with equality constraints imposed on the factor loadings, path coefficients, and factor variances did not result in substantial deterioration of the model fit. The structural model was therefore concluded to be equivalent across the two groups. Inclusion of the control variables did not change these results.

DISCUSSION

The present study sought to examine the cross-cultural generalizability of the TPB as applied to job seeking, by comparing samples of native Dutch and Turkish individuals in The Netherlands. Results supported the equivalence of the measures. Both the factor pattern and factor loadings were comparable across the two samples. Mixed support was found for the predictions based on the TPB. Whereas attitude had a strong effect on intention in both groups (Hypothesis 1a supported), the effect of subjective norm was not significant (Hypothesis 1b not supported). Self-efficacy had a small effect on intention that was significant in the native Dutch group only (Hypothesis 1c partially supported). Several explanations may be offered for the nonsignificant results for subjective norm. For example, job seeking may be of such importance to personal well-being that people are less likely to be heavily influenced by others in forming their intentions. However, a rerun of our analyses excluding the attitude items showed that subjective norm strongly related to intention in both groups but did not add unique variance above the effect of attitude. This might suggest that attitude mediates the impact of subjective norm on intention.

Although the TPB was thus only partially supported, model invariance tests demonstrated that the structural relations as outlined by the TPB were comparable in the native Dutch and the Turkish sample. Although the attitude-intention relation seemed to be stronger in the native Dutch group than in the Turkish group ($\gamma = .71$ vs. $\gamma = .40$), imposing an equality constraint on the attitude-intention and subjective norm–intention relations did not worsen model fit significantly. Thus, intentions in the Turkish sample did not seem to be more affected by subjective norms and less by personal attitudes than in the native Dutch sample (Hypothesis 2 not supported). These findings conflict with other research on cultural differences in the context of job seeking, suggesting that subjective norm is a strong predictor of job search intention in collectivistic cultures (van Hooft, Born, Taris, & van der Flier, 2004). Although evidence exists that collectivistic values are likely to be transmitted within Turkish immigrant families (Phalet & Schönpflug, 2001), the Turkish individuals in our study might have adopted Dutch individualistic values with regard to job seeking.

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Limitations of the present study include nonrandom sampling of the Turkish group, sample size differences between the two groups, reliance on self-report measures, and focus on only two cultural groups. In conclusion, we found support for the cross-cultural generalizability of the TPB as applied to job seeking in The Netherlands. Future research, however, should examine whether this finding generalizes to other cultural groups and other types of behavior.

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